

No New Projects—Mayor Lewis’s State of the City Speech—1/22/07

That’s the lettering on the sign above the door in my office. It’s just a piece of plastic that I put up but it’s a reminder to me for 2007. No new projects.

The reason the sign is there is that we have enough on our plate right now, and we are going to complete what we have started.

Public Safety has been our number one priority and, frankly, by far our number one concern for a very long time, yet we have been so constrained by the voter approved property tax initiative that we were unable to hire even an additional police officer for years.

With the approval by the voters of the Valley Regional Fire Authority we have laid a firm foundation for the best fire service, the best emergency care in South Sound. That vote also means we are moving ahead with our plans to build a new fire station on the south end of town.

The voters also allowed us by that approval to transfer general fund money to our Police Department in 2008. But we are not going to wait any longer, certainly not until 2008. We are already hiring new police officers. But we need more than just more officers. We need a new way to do business to protect our neighborhoods and businesses.

First, we will be seen. The black and white police cars will be back mid-2007 to make sure that the police are seen in all the neighborhoods.

Not only will we be more visible but more involved as we begin to use our Community Response Team officers. This will help facilitate and change how officers respond to quality of life and crime issues in our city. Many of the issues we face in neighborhoods and business areas are not just a ‘police problem,’ but require other resources, and CRT officers will coordinate and focus all—all—available City resources on identified problems throughout the city.

Officers will work to find total solutions to neighborhood issues, solving problems before they become so difficult to work with or have such a negative effect on our community.

Identify the problem and resolve it before it becomes a criminal action. Some of this will be done simply by working together in the neighborhoods or business districts to find and apprehend criminals. We will also need to involve ourselves in long term community efforts to solve persistent problems.

We will continue our efforts to mobilize all government departments necessary to work on problems associated with some of our multi-family housing units. There is no disgrace in being poor; many of us have faced that financial fact in our lives. But no one in the city of Auburn should be placed in unhealthy or unsafe living conditions, and we will be working hard to make sure that the slums of other locales do not come, do not develop in Auburn. All of our citizens deserve safe housing.

For the last decade we have been adding equipment, electronics and other aids to our Police Department since we could not hire officers. We will continue that practice to make every single officer even more valuable and effective.

We will continue to add intersections to our Red Light Photo Enforcement system, and we will continue to remind those just passing through our town—those that don't live here, don't work here—that when it comes to Auburn they must always remember – Don't Run a Red Light in Auburn!

We will also add to the Photo Speeding Enforcement in our school zones. When we see proof of speeding, of people driving 50 mph in a 20 mph zone while there are children present, we will do all we can do to keep our children safe!

But it is not just a matter of more police. For the first time in a decade we believe we will be able to provide the officers we need and the resources we deserve to deal with some of the problems we face. Still, we need more.

We will be working to build on our partnerships with neighborhood groups, homeowners associations and block watches, for we understand that the neighbors know far better than any outsider what is suspicious activity, and we must build more bridges to work together to keep all of us safe.

We have been working in the downtown to improve pedestrian lighting. Now we are going to improve that program further and move out into the neighborhoods. Well lit neighborhoods are safer neighborhoods.

We're not only looking at street lights, but in those older sections of Auburn, especially those built in the county to County standards before they became a part of Auburn. We are looking at storm drains and sewers, and inviting citizens to participate in local improvement districts (LIDs). We are also asking neighborhoods to be involved in putting in missing sections of sidewalks. Since most of our sidewalks were paid for by the people who built their homes or the builder, we cannot pay for individual sidewalks in front of a home that chose not pay for a sidewalk. We cannot use public funds for private benefit.

Still, the City Council has said they would work in a cooperative agreement to pay for part of the cost if the homeowners involved would pay part of their portion for the safety of their neighborhood, their children.

Year after year we are getting calls from the neighborhoods asking for police officers to be stationed on their street, especially during the commute, to stop the speeders. We have been holding neighborhood meetings to find solutions, and I ask you now to call and ask for more of these meetings since we need to identify the problems and work together to find the solutions. Those solutions are complicated and we cannot make them work well without your involvement.

We have been working on this for the last year and Council has approved a series of traffic calming measures for the neighborhoods. We are looking at speed humps and bumps and cushions. We're trying flashing stop signs and caution lights, safety islands in the roads, speed circles and roundabouts where they are appropriate and fit within that neighborhood.

We still need to know when it is the people at the other end of the block that are speeding or if a neighborhood has become a cut-through for a larger traffic problem. If it has become a cut-through then we must first figure out what happens if we put in a traffic calming measure on one street and not the next one over or the four or five beyond that. We must have community involvement and community agreement to find permanent solutions.

There are other solutions as well and with the passage of the County's Transit Now! proposal we have asked that we partner with Metro to provide a Commuter Shuttle that can also be used during the day for a neighborhood shuttle to ease the traffic problem.

Streets are a City priority and our Save Our Streets (SOS) program is into its third year and going strong. It is a perfect opportunity for a block or several blocks to be a part of an LID for storm drains, sidewalks and sewers so that it is all done at once and there is no need to come back and cut and patch the street at a later date. Working together it can cost us all less and we can do so much more.

Your City Council is committed to reaching out to the community and to business to bring them into the process of government. We have a number of committees and boards, and we must have volunteers with new perspectives and opinions about the need to keep our community involved and informed.

I mentioned our City Council and I should remind everyone just how hard working these Councilmembers are in our city. All of them attend at least two council committee meetings per week plus regularly scheduled and special council meetings, adding up to at least 168 total hours per month. Plus, all Councilmembers are on state or regional committees for an additional 50 hours per month as well as national committees that add another 16 hours per month so that they average over 234 hours per month as a Council. When I say this is a working Council, I am quite serious, and this Council doesn't just talk, they truly walk the walk!

Last year this Council laid the foundation not just for the next few years, but also for the next generation by strategic planning and implementing a vision that will ensure Auburn's vitality. This included careful planning to meet growth, transportation, and safety needs while retaining our strong sense of community.

Realizing the increasing need and decreasing funding, the City Council, working with our Human Services Committee, devised a results-based human services system and started work on the one-stop-shop human service center.

Now, Council understands very well that Auburn has extremely limited resources so they chose a different path. They said with the small amount of

money we have we will only fund those organizations that agree to improve the condition of our citizens in need and that in the future we will fund those organizations that agree to work together for the community as a whole in one place, a one-stop-shop human service center.

The one-stop-shop human service center is based on principles such as a results-based evaluation driving the funding, partnerships with the faith community, partnerships between all the agencies to cure problems, and not just running people and families through lines. We need to give careful consideration to facility siting, and we will also use our own new problem-oriented-policing approach to manage instances of crime which can have a positive impact on crime statistics to show that managing the human service part of the City's responsibilities is good business for the whole community.

Funding human services is not the City's primary mission like public safety, utilities, roads, and planning are, but we will continue to help as best we can and we need to remind everyone to keep the pressure on the County and State to honor their human service responsibilities.

Part of the reason we have been so committed to the human service area in Auburn is the continued high incarceration rates compared to other jurisdictions and the very, very high cost of jailing people (\$40,000 per year per inmate for operating costs and \$250,000 per bed for jail construction costs), and our commitment to put the really bad guys in jail for a long time. Our Judge has done his part and we must continue to do ours, but the cost is very high, which is why we are committed to the study of jail alternatives. Our jail handles relatively low risk misdemeanants, not felons who go to the County justice system. Still, every prisoner is a drain on our system and we will continue to seek ways to cut our costs.

Our Council has spent countless hours participating in regional work on growth, transportation, safety, and water issues.

They are working in so many partnerships including our partners within our city limits, the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, and their economic development plans within the Reservation. In partnership we can find ways to work together.

Council worked with the community in devising and implementing an annexation plan that meets the needs of the entire community and provides

the level of service Auburn requires. We must control growth and growth cannot become a cost to our citizens.

They did the work that resulted in implementing the Downtown Plan to secure the downtown core as the center for activities, entertainment, shopping, dining and living. These Councilmembers—your neighbors, your coworkers, the folks that stand in the same grocery line with you—are working hard for all of us.

Before we leave the neighborhoods I must mention two of my concerns. We do have more people moving into our neighborhoods and they are coming for different reasons.

First, we're affordable! People who used to live in Seattle or Bellevue or Redmond are moving to Auburn because they can't afford the cost of housing in the metropolitan core. We have become that area people from Seattle and people from Tacoma are moving to so that they can have a home in a real community.

Second, the jobs are here and not only do we have more people moving here, but we are also having more minorities coming into our area. One of the interesting facts is that those higher end neighborhoods in our city are actually far more culturally diverse.

So, we have a large number of people moving to Auburn. People with no ties, no family connections, some with no work affiliation or any other connection in Auburn, yet one of the factors that drew many of them here was the sense of community.

We must continue to find ways to make them a part of Auburn. We must blend the 'Old Auburn' with the new, and we must find ways to bring together groups rather than allow separation. There are so many degrees of separation from culture and religion to income, yet all of them have so much need to be a part of a larger group, this Auburn community that is willing to care about everyone. Auburn has an open door policy for all of us and we must find ways to increase those possibilities. We will develop plans this year to find new ways for all of us to be a part of Auburn.

This year we are working to find new ways to bring all of the people in Auburn—the long time residents, the brand new arrivals, our minorities, our

immigrants, those from all our neighborhoods—together to learn from each other and still keep our Auburn identity whole.

For that reason we will go out into the community and ask. We will work to identify the different cultures, the needs and the benefits each group brings to Auburn and then we will work to bring out the best of each to make our town even better.

Part of the solution will be found in our Parks, Arts & Recreation Department as we expand our before and after school programs. We do know we must work closer with our school district and our faith community to do more for our children. We must provide more ways for all of our youth to be involved and understand what it means to be a part of a community. We must understand that many of our youth and adults, new to this area, have never been in a community like this before. It is a new experience to work together in partnership and we must find new ways to make them all welcome.

We will expand our Outdoor Cinema Program, complete several new parks and renovate others. There is so much need for our Summer Lunch Program and ESL programs like the ones we run on Channel 21 and the great partnerships between the School District and the faith community.

We will also be working to increase our trails system this year with that trail connection from 15th SW to Pacific's park on the new C Street segment. We will be adding to our Green River Trail and we will be continuing to work in partnership with our Pierce County cities to connect the Interurban Trail to the Foothills Trail that would go all the way to Mt. Rainier and the Riverwalk Trail that goes to Tacoma.

In addition, we have a parks and community resource system second to none in our population size, but we still lack what nearly every other city has, a Community Center. Its value, especially as a way to foster inclusion into our community fabric of the thousands of new residents we expect over the next 15 years, is enormous. This is the year to move forward on this community asset. We will have a Community Center on our Les Gove Campus.

Our downtown merchants are working in cooperation to revitalize our downtown core. We have been working with the merchants by simplifying

codes, policies and procedures while offering assistance where need be, but we remain firm in our conviction that the private sector should be in charge while government helps facilitate the process.

We will always have issues in a rejuvenating downtown like ours and Council remains firm in its commitment to work with the Auburn Downtown Association so that downtown solutions come to the City from the downtown community.

The City has worked to buy small pieces in the downtown to help bring parties to the table, and we are in the process of beginning an Environmental Impact Study for our entire designated Urban Center to help speed the process.

For years we have been told that in order to bring new businesses to our downtown we have to have more people living downtown and there had to be business open at night.

We need more businesses open at night, so we signed a lease with the owners of the Auburn Avenue Theater for ten years so that we could have more great theater, more stage productions, perhaps children's matinees and other events on more days and for more nights in the heart of our downtown to provide more opportunities to our merchants.

We recently signed an agreement that has been approved by the King County Council to allow for a Transit Related Development Project in downtown with a two million dollar investment by King County. This will provide 100 parking places and affordable housing in our downtown.

But all of our work, all of our planning is done with the central thought that any new development downtown must keep our sense of identity so that we do not become another place of skyscrapers—a downtown without a heart.

In addition, your Council, with great forethought, planned for and passed the necessary documents last year to create the Environmental Park and the Green Zone allowing for related development around the park. We have already begun our first projects in the Environmental Park and hope to see business come to the Green Zone this year.

Your Council really did a great body of work last year and it was all done with the direct cooperation of business and our citizens.

They took a long look at the list of requests from the Chamber of Commerce's Business Strategy document, done in partnership with business, the Chamber and the City. Knowing that our town is growing and changing, they took the difficult steps in recognizing change had occurred and changed our maps and plans to conform to reality.

For downtown they saw a residential and commercial area off Main Street that had been slowly taken over by the industrial sector. They knew that downtown would continue to expand and worked to halt the growth of industrial and make more commercial and retail possible in the future.

They looked at the whole A Street corridor and moved to make sure it could be developed as a commercial and retail area in future years, while making sure our existing businesses were not harmed. Those businesses that by their nature no longer fit within code or plan can remain there in their current form as long as they wish to do so. They can expand their physical building by as much as another 25 percent. They can sell that business to someone else wanting to do that same business. Our City simply said these were not places for more intrusive development, and Council took action to save those areas for future commercial and retail operations.

We went to the railroad and this spring our Clean Sweep project will be the planting of Laurel bushes all along the A Street corridor, a signal that the transformation of this area can begin.

We are seeing change in our city and we are changing the way we see ourselves. We are only now realizing that for South King and North Pierce Counties we are the Arts and Entertainment center of a region. We really didn't see it, but others did.

Think about it. We have the largest Performing Arts Center outside of Seattle—1,000 seats fully booked all year long. We're launching the new theater effort based on the history of the single, most successful, for profit dinner theater in the region. The State's racetrack, Emerald Downs, is located just to the north and the region's largest outdoor theater, the White River Amphitheatre, is just a few miles to the south. With our great downtown and our SuperMall, we are at the center of our region. Others

have already seen and understand this; it is now time for us to see it ourselves and to believe.

Out at our Golf Course a brand new club house is being built. Not a dime of tax payer money is being spent, but money from the proceeds of golf fees funds this new construction which will open this summer—a new economic development tool for Auburn, a new attraction for the region.

A new building is going up at Veteran's Memorial Park. I have to tell you I am very pleased to announce that the King County Veteran's Administration will open an office in that building, the first outside the city of Seattle, so that our veterans in need will not have to try and get to Seattle to get the help they deserve.

Lakeland on the south is almost built out while there is new residential construction taking place at the north end of the city.

We have been working with the Valley Drive-In ownership for years and hope to see some commercial development there soon. Perhaps even—finally—that new book store?

The SuperMall area will begin to change again, and the City has worked hard to see more large retailers and more restaurants come in there as well.

There is a cost for all of this; we must plan for it and deal with it now, and we are doing just that. Council has strongly supported the concept that growth-pays-for-growth and this last year raised impact fees. We are still at just the average of what other jurisdictions charge, but we cannot be a bargain basement city. We must make sure our citizens are not impacted by that growth. We will work hard to bring that business, those developments our citizens want and need, but we will not give away the city to do it.

The State's and King County's Growth Management Act requires that we accept higher populations and higher density housing. Still, when these laws were written the State also agreed that those who honored the intent would also have the infrastructure funding needed. That has not been the case.

While the citizens of Auburn have done all that they could do for our local streets by passing the SOS program, it did not include and they could not have been expected to pay for the costs of the major arterials and the truck

routes. If we are to accept more population than the current roads can accommodate, we must have the financial ability to build and maintain those corridors. Auburn Way and A Street, West Valley Hwy., I and M streets must accommodate all of the traffic. Our connector routes like 15th and 17th, 19th, 21st and all the rest must be maintained, yet little money is being returned to the City to maintain these vital roads for commuter or freight traffic and the roads must still be fixed.

Last year we took a hard look at all of our truck routes and even considered removing most truck routes as they could not withstand the traffic load. Yet, if we took them off the list then any slight chance of future financing ended.

We did take some off, others we noted were not maintained at a high enough level for a truck route designation. We know residents and businesses have paid tax after tax, and the money we have been getting back from the State each year keeps decreasing, yet – we still must maintain the roads.

We have a mandate to accept future growth, yet we are told we cannot have the money that is needed to fix those vital corridors for freight and commuters. Traffic is drowning us and destroying our roads every single day because the state highways remain roadblocks, yet – we still must maintain the roads.

We know that business, especially our industrial sector, has been taxed by every level of government and they have no money for roads. We know that the State has lost income because of the voter approved property tax initiative and the change in licensing fees, and they have no money for roads. We know that there will be a change in our state's sales tax structure and we have been a party to that agreement. Part of that agreement means we will receive no new money for future industrial development that might come to our city and we will receive no money for roads.

We have been a good partner to the industrial sector for more than a half century. Over 23% of all the land in Auburn is currently zoned to allow for industrial use. We have worked with the State of Washington as well because of the emphasis on trade.

We have asked and will continue to ask for the industrial sector to come back to partner with us once again, because regardless of the decisions of government on the state or county level, regardless of the current taxes

flowing out of Auburn, regardless of anything else, we will maintain our roads, our arterials, our truck routes.

We ask that the business sector work together with the City of Auburn this year to find those funds no one will commit to because as a city we must maintain those roads.

We ask that those who need to expand industrial uses from the Ports and the State work together in partnership with us to find incentives for our City to expand industrial use and to remind us all we work far better in partnership.

We remind everyone that this year we commit to establishing a new funding mechanism and program to maintain the City's classified street system as well as develop a plan to construct a freight route network of city streets built to truck standards.

We want to work in partnership. We want to work with the industrial community to find a way to allow for more industrial uses. We want to work with the Ports and with the State for the success of the region, but not at the expense of the city. We want to work to make all our businesses more successful. Still, we must make this very, very plain.

This year we will establish a new funding mechanism and program to maintain the City's classified street system as well as develop a plan to construct a freight route network of city streets built to truck standards. Please listen and join us in partnership, for we will complete this project this year.

We will complete our 2007 SOS program, which we will have up on our web site. We will complete M Street south of Auburn Way and we will expand our Intelligent Transportation System, computerizing our traffic signals and adding traffic cameras to Auburn Way North and other major arterials for better traffic management, which also includes having those camera views on our web page.

In addition we will re-stripe many streets and develop a schedule to maintain all existing crosswalks and stop bars throughout the city.

You will also see other traffic improvements like 8th and Harvey—long overdue—a new traffic light on 8th at R Street, as well as the entire West Main Street project from the BNSF tracks west to SR 167.

I mentioned earlier that we are required to take on more people, more growth and higher density by State and County mandate. We have been considering annexing both the West Hill and Lea Hill annexation areas, frankly, to control growth rather than increase it. There has been no new development in the County-controlled area of Lea Hill for several years now. The City of Auburn supplies water to that area and had asked King County for years to use City planning standards for development rather than County standards. We wanted to see urban road standards, not rural, used in developing areas. We saw the startling amount of growth that had taken place in Kent's portion of the Lea Hill area, especially the rows of huge apartment buildings, and we knew we could not afford to have all that traffic move through our city. So we stopped approving water applications for any new development until they used our City standards.

No new applications have been approved since, but that's not fair either to the landowners up on Lea Hill, many of whom are residents or business owners here in Auburn. So we will put annexation on the ballot this year. There's no new cost to our residents, it must be self-supporting and the agreements we have worked out with King County and with the State of Washington would allow for that. We must control the growth that would use our streets, our hillsides for access; it must come into Auburn to protect all of our futures.

Still, for annexations to occur it must be financially reasonable for our City and our residents. There can be no additional cost to current residents. With these annexations the City of Auburn will qualify under existing state law passed last year for an additional .1% of the State's current portion of sales tax totaling \$1.8 million per year or \$18 million dollars over a maximum period of ten years. With the agreement recently completed with King County that will enhance tax revenue and reduce infrastructure costs far beyond the 10 years, this action is feasible and reasonable for our citizens.

We must also remember that we have done annexations on our southern borders into Pierce County, and our Pierce County residents are part of Auburn and need to be officially involved in solving city problems and charting our growth.

I mentioned earlier that we were required to accept more growth, yet we are being restrained from it by the actions of the State. We simply must have the funds to maintain the infrastructure if we are to be required to accept more people.

There's another concern for Auburn in that we sit directly on top of one of the largest aquifers in this state and we can no longer take any more water out of it than we are permitted to do today. Now, with our current permits we have more than an adequate supply for our citizens. Still, if we were to meet the demands for growth in the Growth Management Act then we would need additional water.

We are told that access to that use is closed to us, yet the Cascade Water Alliance is in the process of being approved to allow the transportation of tens of millions of gallons of water every day from the White River out of our area to ship by pipeline to Bellevue and the eastside cities.

The State of Washington and King County are requiring us to take more growth, yet the Department of Ecology is telling us we cannot use the water it takes to support that population. There are some in government who have answered our concerns by suggesting that we should pay to buy into Cascade's system, which includes a full share cost of a pipeline to Bellevue.

We will continue to work for the water rights we need to meet the mandate of the State, but we recognize that the time may come when caught between two powerful State agencies we will have no choice left but to take action to change one mandate or the other.

You've heard that all of our Councilmembers are involved in regional as well as local committees. The reason is we have so little choice in the matter. We are all tired of seeing our streets, our routes to and from work, congested because the highways are roadblocks. We need to have State Highway 167 fixed and we need it done soon, not in 2020 or longer as some people in government have suggested.

We must have the lanes built from I-5 at Tacoma to Puyallup and we must have additional lanes from Puyallup all the way to I-405. We certainly need the interchange of State Highway 167 and I-405 fixed right this time. We

need that mess up at Highway 18 and I-5 fixed and Highway 18 fully divided for our safety.

Everyone in the valley needs State Highway 509 completed and all of this needs to get done before—before, not after—they shut down the viaduct and the floating bridge and dump another 100,000 cars every day on our roads for as much as a decade.

That is why this city began meeting almost two years ago with the cities of Tukwila, Renton, Kent, Algona, Pacific, Sumner, Puyallup and Fife. We formed an organization called Valley Cities and part of our agenda has been to move forward an agenda for State Highway 167 that begins at the Port of Tacoma and ends with the connection—a new and better connection—to I-405.

Just this last year Valley Cities invited their Chamber of Commerce to attend the meetings and we were pleased to see the South County Chamber Transportation Coalition meeting several weeks ago announce their agenda and determination to complete all of the Valley Cities projects and more.

In addition, we still need a solution for Auburn Way South—that's actually called State Route 164—the by-pass route to get that amphitheater traffic and, frankly, the commute traffic every day, off of our local streets. We are working with the State of Washington, specifically with the Department of Transportation. If that corridor is of interest to you then start telling your State Representatives both in the House and Senate. You can make a difference. For those who have been silent, your silence has made a difference all these years so make your feelings known. Now is the time to speak up.

We have many needs here in our city. We have new problems and old. We have been changing directions yet maintaining our traditions. Still, when I go before a group I am always proud to announce that I am from Auburn, Land of Two Rivers, Home to Two Nations, the Arts and Entertainment Center for Two Counties. This is Auburn and we are – More Than You Imagined.